

An Academic Network to Examine an “OSCE Process” for Asia

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INTRODUCTION

Excellencies, Mr. Co-Chairmen, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great honor and pleasure for me to participate in this conference organized by the OSCE and the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand.

Today, I have been asked to address how an Asian Academic Network might be created to assess the relevance of the OSCE experience to the security challenges Asia faces, both from nontraditional as well as traditional security threats, and as a complement to the OSCE recommendation on a Research Institute Network when it examined Partner Outreach in 2004.

We know that the twenty-first century holds a broad array of security challenges for the world community. Nontraditional transnational security threats had less attention paid to them during the period of Cold War superpower competition, but now command the attention of governments across the globe. Nowhere are these recently emerged threats more prevalent than in Asia. WMD proliferation, terrorism, arms control, human and drug trafficking, transnational crime, environmental hazards, energy insecurity, intra-regional health issues, piracy, and illegal migration and many others require the formulation of new and creative resolution mechanisms. Meanwhile, entrenched traditional challenges – such as on the Korean peninsula, across the Taiwan Strait, and in the Kashmir – continue to be formidable for Asian leaders.

Some have posited that successful resolution of the North Korea nuclear crisis through the Six-Party Talks process might provide the model for new security architecture to counter these current and emerging threats, particularly among the Northeast Asia states. Similarly, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is an important regionally-organized mechanism to address challenges across the region, especially in Southeast Asia.

The U.S. alliance system in the Asia-Pacific itself has done much to prevent the outbreak of conflict in the region, but it has been unable to resolve all of the problems that threaten the future of Asian stability.

The contentious historical nature of traditional security challenges, coupled with the region's traditional rivalries and at times deep-rooted distrust, continues to complicate the development of coherent regional security structures and processes.

AN ASIAN ACADEMIC NETWORK

Where will governments and multilateral organizations obtain innovative ideas for dealing with new and emerging security challenges? What forum will allow for the examination of these new concepts in an academically rigorous social science environment? And how will concerned policymakers gain access to the results?

A key role is likely to be played by Track II Dialogues, including those already in existence such as the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD)¹ and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP)². Each has served to facilitate security-focused dialogue in and among Asia communities of experts and both remain important to U.S. interests in their particular areas of focus.

But where can policymakers in Asia turn both for policy content and appropriate structural models? *One idea is to examine whether the mechanisms developed in Europe by the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) have the capacity and tools which might assist leaders in Asia in addressing regional security challenges.* OSCE's integrated approach to security, economics, human rights and democracy development presents policy content that has passed the test of time and might be of assistance in addressing Asia's new challenges. Moreover, the OSCE, the world's largest regional security organization, represents decades of experience in addressing the most difficult structural issues of the post World War II world order.

What principles ought to govern the assessment of the applicability of an OSCE structure in Asia? Fundamentally, there must be the recognition that Asia's imperatives are different from Europe's and that in whatever ways such an examination of OSCE's processes occurs it must appropriately address cultural considerations in the enormously divergent Asia-Pacific region. Further, any such effort ought to fully examine the processes of the OSCE and their long-term application to Asia, and not merely look for short-term "fixes" to the urgent problems of today. Finally, it would seem that any proposed solutions must come from Asia and Asians must have the ownership of these solutions.

These imperatives argue for both innovative research models as well as a majority participation of Asian experts.

¹ Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogues were founded in 1993 to provide a "track-two," or unofficial, forum where foreign and defense ministry officials, military officials, and academics from China, Russia, North and South Korea, Japan, and the United States are able to meet for frank discussions of regional security issues.

² CSCAP was founded in 1993 as the first region-wide forum to foster multilateral security dialogue. Membership represents more than twenty countries and regions. CSCAP members seek to enhance regional security and stability through dialogue, consultations, and cooperation on concrete policy issues and problems of mutual concern. CSCAP research and analyses support and complement the efforts of regional governments and official multilateral dialogue mechanisms. USCSCAP is comprised of approximately 150 members.

At The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), we have pioneered work on addressing regional security issues in unique ways and moreover have seventeen years of experience in working with Asian partners. We focus on two important areas that are relevant to consideration of an “OSCE for Asia” examination process.

First, we are committed to bridging the gap between academia and policymaking in the Asia-Pacific in ways that serve to inform and strengthen the development of policy. “Bridging the gap” requires both the highest quality of non-partisan and non-ideological academic research and innovative means of delivering that research to policymakers in ways useful to their unique environments. NBR’s *AccessAsia* database of more than 3,800 scholars is the world’s most extensive repository of Asia policy experts, including most of those participating in ongoing Track II efforts, and is a natural starting point for an Asian Academic Network to examine an OSCE process.

Secondly, NBR has developed and tested methodologies that facilitate the consideration of entrenched security problems by creatively positing the terms whereby current challenges could be successfully resolved, and then assessing the implications of those resolutions. These “thought experiments” have proved to be invaluable tools for developing new approaches to current problems, or for developing approaches to emerging problems, and are particularly well-suited to shaping the assessment of an OSCE-like approach for Asia. Because these efforts are undertaken at first by scholars not directly involved with policy implementation, they are able to fully explore truly creative approaches to intractable issues.

AN “OSCE FOR ASIA” ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE

How would such an effort to assess the applicability of OSCE processes to Asia be organized? First order questions include who should participate. We would submit that an Asian Academic Network ought to draw on experts and scholars from the North American, European and Asian nations in order to more fully assess whether OSCE processes can assist Asia’s leaders. I’ve already mentioned *AccessAsia* as a starting point in organizing those scholars.

Second, where might a conference be held? Since the majority of the OSCE’s five Asian Partners for Cooperation are in Northeast Asia, it might make sense that a conference on OSCE applicability to Asia would first take place in Tokyo, Seoul or Ulaanbaatar.

Third, what should such a conference address? A possible conference agenda might first spend a day discussing the principles of the OSCE, with the objective of increasing understanding of its successes while identifying those mechanisms, procedures and principles most appropriate for contending with Asian security threats. A second day’s agenda could include an examination of the practical application of OSCE mechanisms to one or two very specific security challenges in Asia, drawn from the list I identified at the outset, with the explicit purpose of using OSCE processes to develop policy options.

Follow-up conferences would use the same methodology to examine a broader range of challenges. As I indicated at the beginning, this is a longer-term undertaking and not a search for a short-term fix.

CONCLUSION

In concluding, let me reiterate that Asia's current and emerging security challenges demand new and original approaches. OSCE's long experience in both content and process present a fertile area for research by experts in the issues Asia faces. As a first step, an examination of an Asia-specific application of OSCE's unique content and process could make an important contribution to regional security and stability over the long term. At The National Bureau of Asian Research, we would relish the opportunity to join in the process of developing an Asian Academic Network that would support this effort, and would welcome sharing ownership of this initiative.

Again, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak here today.